The Story of Barsisa: Deceived by the Devil

Islamic Stories - Volume 37

Written by Mansoor Ali Shah

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Chapter 1: The Ascetic Among the Israelites

A Reputation of Piety:

Imam al-Baghawi, in Maʿalim al-Tanzil, narrated this incident on the authority of Abdullah ibn Abbas and Ata, among others. There once lived a devout worshipper among the Children of Israel, whose name was Barsisa. He had devoted himself to the worship of God for seventy years.

The Ritual of Solitude:

He would enter his cell to perform prayers and emerge only after ten days. During fasts, he would refrain from food for ten days before breaking his fast. The accursed Devil sought to lead him astray. Despite numerous attempts, Barsisa remained steadfast and unmoved.

Chapter 2: The Devil’s Design

The Council of Deception:

At last, the chief of the devils convened a meeting and declared:

Chief Devil:

“Is there any among you capable enough to mislead Barsisa and render him a disbeliever before his death?”

A devil named Abyad responded with confidence:

Abyad:

“To misguide him is a simple matter.”

Abyad assumed responsibility for the task and departed from the assembly.

The Deceptive Neighbour:

He pitched his camp at a slight distance from Barsisa and began to worship with ostentation. His ritual lasted forty days, after which he would emerge. One day, Abyad called out to Barsisa in an affectionate tone. Barsisa, however, did not respond. Ten days later, upon concluding his prayers and fast, Barsisa exited his cell and found Abyad engrossed in devotion.

The First Encounter:

Moved by the sight, Barsisa was filled with compassion and approached him.

Barsisa:

“Brother, please forgive me. I was absorbed in my worship and thus unable to respond earlier. What is it that you desire?”

Abyad:

“I wish to enter your cell and worship alongside you.”

Barsisa:

“That is not possible. You cannot enter my cell.”

Barsisa returned to his solitude, denying Abyad entry.

Chapter 3: The Illusion of Piety

A Year of Worship Together:

Undeterred, Abyad continued his ostentatious acts for another forty days. Upon Barsisa's next emergence, he was struck by a sense of guilt for having excluded such a seemingly devout soul.

The principle of "al-jins yamilu ila al-jins" (like attracts like) took hold. Eventually, he permitted Abyad to join him inside the cell.

The two worshipped together for a year. In time, Barsisa admitted:

Barsisa:

“You exceed me in worship.”

He showed great humility.

Barsisa:

“This man has endured immense spiritual effort. He is surely close to the Lord.”

Chapter 4: The Warning Unheeded

A Veiled Critique:

A sombre reflection followed:

Narrative Note:

“It is regrettable that people no longer scrutinise whether those they deem saints may actually be devils in disguise. Today, the masses wrongly elevate ignorant spiritual leaders, misleading themselves and others.”

A Farewell and Final Deception:

Eventually, Abyad declared:

Abyad:

“I am departing to visit a fellow disciple or perhaps my spiritual guide has limited my time here.”

Barsisa:

“I cannot bear your absence. There is great joy in our shared worship. Please do not go.”

Abyad:

“I must leave. You engage in minimal worship compared to what I had heard. However, let me advise you—devotion alone is not the ultimate virtue. It is far better to benefit others.”

Abyad:

“Khayr al-nas man yanfa al-nas — the best of people is he who benefits others.”

Before leaving, he gave Barsisa a charm:

Abyad:

“Here is an incantation. If you recite this over the sick, they will recover instantly.”

Chapter 5: The Illness of a Princess

The Ill Omen:

Barsisa began using the charm. The sick would visit and depart cured. One day, he was brought a princess—an extraordinarily beautiful girl whose three brothers, princes, had sought every remedy for her illness in vain. Their father, a king, had died, and their uncle now ruled the kingdom.

The Devil's Recommendation:

Seeing no improvement, Abyad visited the brothers and suggested:

Abyad:

“Take her to Barsisa the saint. If he performs the incantation, she will recover. Otherwise, her illness will persist.”

Though Barsisa detested public interaction and shunned people, visitors began arriving regularly.

Abyad congratulated the chief devil:

Abyad:

“I have succeeded in misleading Barsisa.”

Chapter 6: The Fall into Sin

Temptation and Sin:

Eventually, the brothers brought their sister to Barsisa. She was cured. Over time, she relapsed, and on Abyad's advice, a room was built next to Barsisa's cell to accommodate her.

The pattern continued: ten days of recovery, then relapse. One day, Barsisa noticed her beauty. The Devil whispered:

Abyad (whispering):

"Enjoy her. Repent later. God's mercy is vast."

Barsisa succumbed. He committed sin repeatedly until she became pregnant.

The Crime of Concealment:

Again, the Devil whispered:

Abyad (whispering):

“Kill her and bury her in the wilderness. Otherwise, you will be disgraced.”

He accepted this counsel. He killed her and buried her near a hill.

Chapter 7: Exposure and Punishment

The Dream of Truth:

Abyad then appeared in the brothers' dreams:

Abyad (in dream):

"Barsisa defiled your sister and killed her. She lies buried in such-and-such a place."

Initially sceptical, they confronted Barsisa, who replied:

Barsisa:

"A jinn has taken her away."

They believed him and felt ashamed for their suspicion. But Abyad returned in their dreams:

Abyad (in dream):

"She lies buried near such-and-such a wilderness and mountain."

Upon investigation, they found the grave with a piece of her garment protruding. Opening it, they found her body—pregnant.

The Trial:

News spread. Authorities demolished Barṣīṣā's cell, beat him severely, and shackled him. He was brought before the high court.

Chapter 8: The Final Deception

The Offer of Rescue:

As Barsisa stood trial, Abyad appeared before him in human form:

Abyad:

“You have disgraced all saints and elders. I am the same worshipper who once stayed with you.”

Barsisa:

“Is there any way to save myself?”

Abyad:

“Prostrate to me, and I shall save you.”

Barsisa complied. Then Abyad revealed his identity:

Abyad:

“I am not a worshipper. I am the Devil. My aim was to make you die a disbeliever.”

He was then executed by the state, having died a disbeliever.

Chapter 9: A Lesson for Posterity

The Tragedy of Apostasy:

The moral is profound: had he not prostrated to other than God, there might have been hope for divine forgiveness. Had he avoided polytheism, repentance was still possible. But his end came upon disbelief, and thus he was consigned to Hell.